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Methods for fostering success in the transition to high school

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METHODS FOR FOSTERING SUCCESS IN THE TRANSITION TO HIGH SCHOOL

An Abstract of a Thesis

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Education Specialist

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to examine newly implemented changes in transition supports at a large high school in the Midwest. Factors that affect success include attendance, environment, student characteristics and self-efficacy, socio-economic status and family support, peer pressure, teacher and school support, and race and gender differences. To determine the success of the new transition program, data were gathered regarding achievement and attendance outcomes for transitioning students in intervention and comparison groups. In addition, differences in outcomes were investigated for socioeconomic status groups and gender. Student opinions of the school environment, parent/teacher support, extra-curricular involvement, and the "New Student" day were gathered through a student survey and personal interviews. The intervention group had fewer absences in ninth grade than did the comparison group, but there was no difference in grade point averages. Results suggest that the interventions were determined by students to be more helpful than not. School attendance and GPA records do not directly link success to the interventions. However, they do show areas to target in future interventions.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

With school systems' resources focused on high-stakes testing, at-risk students are not receiving the support they need and are being not only left behind - but left out. Carnoy (2005) asserted that the biggest present risk to American high schools is low completion rates, especially for students who come from families with low socioeconomic status. Carnoy further expressed concern that educational quality must be improved to ensure that students are not retained and instead get the help needed to finish their classes. If they are unable to do so, "they are likely to be marginalized from the mainstream and to become a social liability" (p. 19). The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation also supports avoiding retention in its requirement of reporting state graduation rates, defined as the percentage of students who graduate secondary school with a regular diploma in the standard number of years (Wheelock & Miao, 2005). Research by Neild, Stoner-Eby, and Furstenberg, Jr. (2001) found in urban high schools that ninth grade attendance and course failure substantially impacted the likelihood of dropping out of high school. Neild et al. maintained that urban high schools seeking to reduce dropout rates should enable students to successfully transition from middle school to ninth grade. Likewise, Watson (2004) argued that the benefits of supporting and providing programs that promote a successful transition from middle school to high school make it worth taking time away from high-stakes testing preparation.

The issue of transition is increasingly being recognized as a strong factor in school connectedness and eventual graduation. Major educational organizations such as

the National Middle School Association (NMSA) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) acknowledge the necessity of providing transitional support between middle and high schools (Hertzog & Morgan, 1998).

Advancing from middle to high school is a potentially stressful life event that involves critical shifts in roles and puts students in a vulnerable position (French, Seidman, Allen & Aber, 2000; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Reyes, Gillock, & Kobus, 1994). The feelings of stress and powerlessness that accompany transition have the potential to impede future academic success. Shor (1998, p. 6) stated it succinctly. "The transition to high school has been associated with academic and adaptive difficulties which can lead to serious consequences such as high school dropout." Research by Falbo, Lein, and Amador (2001) is in forceful agreement about transition being crucial in determining the graduation and post secondary future for students.

Transition to high school encompasses students' education from the fall of eighth grade through the spring of their ninth grade year. The advantages of receiving academic and transitional support early in a student's eighth grade year will carry over into high school and beyond. Green and Scott (1995) found that achievement in eighth grade is related to success in high school and that identifying characteristics of those at risk can affect future outcomes. Murdock, Anderman, and Hodge's (2000) research has shown that less adapted ninth grade students were less adapted in middle school. Further, research by Isakson and Jarvis (1999) determined that successful eighth grade students are able to adapt to their new environment by the end of their ninth grade year. Both Murdock et al.'s and Isakson and Jarvis' studies identified the need for early intervention

as vital to a successful transition. Weiss (1999) and Huurre, Aro, Rahkonen, and Komulainen (2006) more concisely linked early success and failure to long-term achievement. Weiss stressed that poor ninth grade performance sets a pattern for failure. Huurre et al. (p. 50) quoted a more positive reason for funding a strong transition program that fosters early success. "Good early academic performance generates rewards for students, which, in turn, reinforce their commitment to education and enhance their future academic performance."

The purpose of this paper is to examine the newly implemented changes in transition supports at a large high school in the Midwest. An effective transition program must address known challenges inherent to moving from middle school to high school. Factors that affect success include attendance, environment, student characteristics and self-efficacy, socio-economic status and family support, peer pressure, teacher and school support, and race and gender issues.

Data were gathered regarding the transitioning students' grades, attendance, socio-economic status, gender, and racial/ethnic group. Further information was gathered through a student survey about parent and teacher support, homework completion, extracurricular activities, and student opinions of school and the "New Student" program. The following is a review of literature addressing the factors necessary for successful transitions to high school.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

For students of all abilities, the transition to a new school is known to be a challenging experience. Falbo, Lein, and Amador (2001) asserted that the impact of transition to high school can determine whether a student is trained for postsecondary education or drops out of high school. School districts are becoming increasingly aware that they must increase their support to transitioning students in order to ensure a strong academic start to their high school careers.

Good attendance and grades early in a high school career can set the stage for graduation. The sooner students can link their attendance to school performance; the sooner they can establish a pattern of good attendance and a sense of connectedness to the school and to school adults. When students feel they are part of the environment, they are more likely to engage in schoolwork and activities. One important piece to the comfort level of the environment is familiarity with the building itself and the routines within it.

Student personalities, ecological factors, ethnicities and perceptions of support all factor into high school success. Schools must be sure that their transition plans provide a comprehensive range of supports that can meet the needs of a diverse student body. The research into the phenomenon surrounding transition and student success is largely centered around identifying the factors involved in a successful transition and how it affects student outcomes. What research has not provided is a specific plan explaining

how schools should address those factors. The following review of literature will identify the specific components necessary for building a strong transition program.

Elements of a Successful Transition

Academic Indicators

Of all the variables related to student success, grade point average (GPA) and attendance are the most obvious and most frequently studied outcomes. Barone, Aguirre-Deandreis, and Trickett (1991, p. 222) stated "high school transition has immediate negative consequences on student grades and attendance." The ability of an incoming ninth grade student to negotiate the intensified social and academic world of high school often fails in comparison to his or her middle school prowess. Many students show significant decreases in GPA and attendance following the transition to high school and the pattern continues throughout the school year (Barone et al., 1991; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999).

Of even greater concern are the findings that students generally do not recover from a rocky academic start. Studies by Reyes, Gillock, Kobus, and Sanchez (2000) found that students rarely recuperated from a grade loss at the beginning of their ninth grade year, and that they instead continued to achieve at the same level for the remainder of high school. On the other hand, Isakson and Jarvis (1999) determined that successful eighth grade students were able to adapt to their new environment and recover from transition difficulties by the end of their ninth grade year. Students who struggled in eighth grade did not have the same outcomes. The overwhelming conclusion is that

moving from middle to high school has negative effects on attendance and grades of many students.

New Environment/Physical Setting

The most observable and immediate element students encounter when transitioning to high school is the change in the actual school setting and environment. During transition there are, "critical shifts in roles and settings…" (French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2000, p. 588) as incoming ninth grade students adapt to a new building while functioning in the midst of a much larger and more mature student body. Despite the fact that Reyes et al. (2000) acknowledged that some students are excited by the opportunities of the larger environment, they have found that the majority of students are initially intimidated by it. Surveys of incoming ninth grade students have identified a number of basic issues that interfere with a smooth transition and research has found that, "student perceptions are an accurate index of the school environment" (Reyes et al., p. 583). Beyond concern about more difficult academic work, most worry about getting lunch, finding classes, opening lockers, avoiding hazing and acting in a socially acceptable manner in order to fit in. Issues of perception of safety and adjusting to the new academic environment magnify the negative effects of the transition on students' performance, particularly in science and math (King Rice, 2001).

Among the many obstacles to overcome in a new environment is surviving in the more anonymous setting. Research has shown that incoming ninth grade students suffer from role loss as they are no longer the top scholar or athlete, and many lose contact with their closest friends (Newman, Myers, Newman, Lohman, & Smith, 2000; Reyes et al.,

2000). Added competition and anonymity lends itself to the demoralization of an already struggling student. Additionally, pressure builds in the high school environment because graduation looms in the future. Academically, students find that teachers expect them to take on more responsibility while simultaneously these same students are being faced with new social challenges and more complex peer relations (Falbo et al., 2000; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Newman et al., 2000). "In addition, perceptions of the school environment also deteriorate, with students finding high school to be a less friendly place and reporting increased feelings of anonymity" (Reyes et al., p.522). Reyes et al. also found that when high school classroom arrangement and ninth-grade teams are similar to those at middle schools the students are more successful and the dropout rate is much lower. Ninth grade students that are unable to negotiate the new environment are likely to feel disengaged or alienated. Still, of the multiple concerns of incoming students, Akos and Galassi (2004b) found that most students will probably adjust much more quickly to the procedural aspects of a school transition than to its academic or social aspects.

Student Characteristics

According to Akos and Galassi (2004a), studies suggest that negative outcomes such as decreased academic motivation and self-esteem occur for many students going through a transition. The perception of belonging or connectedness in the school environment serves as a protective factor that enhances the ability of students to remain engaged in school. However, in the much larger and competitive high school setting, many students are separated from their middle school peers and feel isolated amid the new crowds. Because social interactions have greater emphasis in high school, ninth

grade students may encounter feelings of alienation as they grapple with their evolving identity within the new environment (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999). Additionally, incoming ninth grade students often lose the advantage of building relationships with teachers once they leave elementary and middle school. Such relationships with teachers at the high school level are inhibited by the greater number and mix of the student body (Reyes et al., 2000). Research by Shor (1998, p. 6) indicated that students' decisions to drop out may be due to academic and adaptive problems that originate with the transition from middle school to high school. Shor's conclusion is consistent with the findings of Reyes et al., that at early adolescence some students reach a point where school behavior and academic motivation begin a downward spiral toward dropping out of school.

Self-efficacy. Fundamental to a student's motivation during transition are his or her feelings of self-efficacy (his or her personal measure of optimism) for being successful in the new situation. Educational self-efficacy is built during elementary and middle school and is influenced by students' personalities and attitudes (Reyes et al., 2000). Successful completion of eighth grade is one way to increase a student's educational optimism as he or she enters ninth grade. Students entering high school with already low academic perceptions continue a pattern of disengagement despite available support (Reyes et al.,). Silverthorn, DuBois, and Crobie (2005, p. 192) found that self-efficacy specifically related to academic abilities is more closely related to academic achievement during transition than is generalized self-efficacy.

An incoming ninth grade student confident in his or her academic ability will be more motivated to succeed (Eccles, Wigfield, Midgley, Reuman, Mac Iver, & Feldlaufer,

1993). Conversely, students who are at risk academically feel less empowered to affect their outcomes (Shor, 1998). Although students may feel negatively about their academic success and school, Murdock, Anderman, and Hodge Murdock (2000) found that students at risk of dropping out do not necessarily feel badly about themselves.

Since perceptions were found by Reyes et al. (2000) to be an accurate index of the school environment, students' opinions and concerns about the new environment must be considered when planning for a successful transition. In a study conducted by Newman et al., (2000) the majority of participants viewed ninth grade as more difficult than eighth grade, and nearly half of high achievers perceived hard work and focus as being crucial to success. Students performing at a lower level perceived completing work and having easier assignments as being necessary for success, indicating more external locus of control than the higher performers. Specifically, although most students said the work was more difficult in ninth grade, higher achievers were more likely than lower achievers to see effort as the key to success. Among other things this may have given them greater motivation to work hard and persist when work was difficult.

Self- identity and social adjustment. Addressing the issues of assimilating into the new environment coincides with a time when adolescents are still unsure about who they are and where they fit into society as a whole. Social challenges in the high school setting are more defined. High achieving, peer-accepted middle school students may find themselves more isolated and labeled as a "brain" or a "prep" once they enter high school, while students with Individual Education Plans will have even greater concerns about navigating the high school world and picking up on social cues (Isakson & Jarvis,

1999; Watson, 2004). Both situations stand to influence the already changing adolescents' self-image. Further, in the more competitive high school atmosphere eighth grade athletes may suffer as they lose their identity, and failing to make the team or falling to a lesser team position results in a decline in interest in sports (Watson, 2004).

Autonomy. Ninth grade students are also by nature struggling with issues of maturation, both looking forward to high school autonomy yet still needing security and support (Mac Iver & Epstein, 1991; Reyes et al., 2000). Indeed high school demands more self-reliance of its students (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999). Involved parents are faced with the tasks of providing a sense of increasing levels of autonomy while restricting it in the best interest of the student's academic future. Isakson and Jarvis' research revealed that the independence granted by parents is often replaced by the influence of peers since autonomy requires increased self-reliance by the student who may not be ready to make decisions for himself. Further, when students perceived themselves as having lower autonomy they had a higher GPA and an even greater sense of membership within the school setting than those with higher autonomy. This was true even though students named increasing autonomy in high school as a positive part of the transition (Isakson & Jarvis; Reyes et al.). This contradiction of perceived vs. actual needs supports the argument of providing strong transition programming that includes and even encourages parent participation because it reduces the possibility of students shutting out their parents' school involvement.

Socio-Economic Status and Family Support

Parents of ninth grade students play a key role in supporting their children's transition to high school while also providing increasing amounts of autonomy. The majority of research has found that students with strong family support adjust better during the transition to high school. Falbo, et al. (2001) used surveys of eighth grade students and families before and after they transitioned to a high school five times larger than their middle school. Their results indicated that parental involvement is essential to success. Baker and Stevenson's study (1986) found that sometimes, "... the child's performance and mother's education combined to influence the mother's actions." Because parents' and students' personalities differ greatly, the amount of support and autonomy will vary greatly for each parent/child pair (Baker & Stevenson). Parents' personal well-being, educational and socio-economic background, and their ability to evaluate the information about the welfare of their child can be critical to the success of the ninth grade students' transition (Falbo et al.; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999). Research by Newman et al. (2000) on transition of low-income African American youth found that parents' perception of school and their ninth grade students' abilities were quite predictive of success, and high performing students overwhelmingly (92%) credit their mothers as most supportive of their educations.

Baker and Stevenson (1986) found a family's socioeconomic status to be moderately associated with the level of daily involvement in a child's education. Baker and Stevenson discovered that mothers with higher SES were more likely to be involved and knew about their students' performance. Further, higher SES mothers with higher

education know who to contact and were more active when difficulties arose. These same mothers were more likely to choose college preparation classes for their children and become more actively involved when their child was struggling (Baker & Stevenson). Murdock et al. (2000) also found a correlation between SES and success. Some students from low-income and minority families doubted or questioned the value of education. Involvement in a child's life presents parents an opportunity to guide their youth. Parents taking part in their students' education have more successful students than those parents that feel overwhelmed and out of control (Newman et al., 2000).

Parent experience, attitudes, and perceptions regarding the value of education also play a part in their students' adjustment to high school. Falbo et al. (year) determined that parent involvement can be organized into three categories: being active in assignments, direct participation of parent in the school setting, and enrolling and supporting extra-curricular activities in order to arrange desirable peer networks. Research done by others easily assimilates into Falbo et al.'s three categories. Family support for adolescent adjustment includes getting tutors, helping with projects, and being mindful of students' stress levels (Falbo et al.; Hartos & Power, 2000). Studies by Baker and Stevenson (1986) found a positive relationship between a student's GPA and the number of methods mothers suggested as strategies for homework completion and adapting to the new environment. The key to being able to intervene is being actively involved on a daily basis. Consistent daily monitoring yields the best chances for teens to avoid problems as it allows parents an opportunity to intervene early with attendance problems, homework completion, and peer issues (Falbo et al.).

Despite the growing autonomy of teens, parent involvement inside the school building has consistently been found advantageous for the student. Within the school setting, parents and peers continue to have an influence on student success. Specifically, parents visible in the school setting encourage teachers to "direct information about opportunities to the student and his or her parents, increasing the likelihood that the ninth grader becomes involved in special classes and school activities" (Falbo et al., p. 527).

Peer Pressure

Adolescents transitioning to high school may realize the importance of academic success and fear that classes may be too difficult. Nonetheless, at this juncture in their development building friendships and consolidating their identity plays a large role in their transition concerns. A study by Hertzog and Morgan (1996) found that what students felt was most important in transitioning to high school was the value of developing close friendships. Shor (1998) found that students' abilities to adjust to their new school as well as their choice of peer groups had the potential to affect their academic success. Shor's assertion concurs with findings of Isakson and Jarvis (1991) and Newman et al. (2000) that peer groups are salient in academic outcomes.

Although most researchers find support for the influences of peers on academic success (e.g. Hertzog & Morgan, 1996; Isakson & Jarvis, 1991; Newman et al., 2000; Shor, 1998), Barone et al.'s (1991) results gave conflicting results about the role of peers (delinquent opposed to non-delinquent) in school-related outcomes. Their studies did not find a correlation between level of social support and GPA or attendance, yet Barone et al. found social support to be a potentially important resource in relation to other school-

based outcomes such as quality of school life, ability to adjust to change, and ability to manage anxiety within the school context. This finding was especially true with the positive influence of non-delinquent peers. Additionally, Newman et al. found that friends are good for social support in African American student groups, but not necessarily for academic support. "African American students may have difficulty finding peers who encourage the pursuit of academics" (Newman et al., p. 2). Murdock et al. (2000) deduced that peer values at the middle school level are related to high school success. This is in agreement with French et al. (2000, p. 589) who found, "The social support received from being surrounded by one's group allowed for greater consolidation of one's identity."

Peer influence then, must be monitored in order to avoid a negative impact. The ability to resist negative peer pressure is perceptibly linked to success on many levels. Some peer groups may discourage "conforming to the values and behaviors desired by teacher" (Murdock et al., 2000, p. 329). Enrolling students in specific extra-curricular activities such as church groups and athletic teams can serve to provide a desirable peer network and helps deter feelings of social alienation or isolation (Falbo et al., 2001; Newman et al., 2000). Despite its link to involvement in risky behaviors such as drinking, participation in team sports had a positive link to educational trajectories. Additionally, adolescent participation in extra-curricular activities has been linked to adult success (Eccles & Barber, 1999).

Students struggling academically may consequently find alternative arenas for approval through succumbing to negative peer influences (Murdock et al., 2000). Parental

involvement can work toward circumventing such negative peer influences. Further, Fletcher, Steinberg, and Dornbusch (1995) found that the influence of peers' parents generates even more success. The authoritativeness of peers' parents is associated with greater GPAs and time spent on homework, and higher authoritativeness lowered the rate of student distress, delinquency and misconduct (Fletcher et al., 1995). Adolescent male academic attendance, performance, and behavior were better for those who associated with a large number of nonrelated adults (Fletcher et al.). The influence of parents, peers' parents and nonrelated adults (including teachers) supports the need for a transition program with salient adult involvement. Both peer and adult connectedness help ease successful transitions. Based on their research, Isakson and Jarvis (1991) concurred, finding that students with support from peers and teachers were more likely to adjust well after the transition to high school than those students who had little support.

Teacher and School Support

Given the importance of adult involvement in successful transitions and the frequent interactions between teachers and students, it stands to reason that teachers hold a highly influential role in transition success. Research by Stone (2003) found ninth grade teachers (as compared to those teaching eighth grade) to be less likely to welcome parents to class, encourage feedback from community and parents, and to communicate with parents. The difficulty in providing such opportunities evolves from balancing the students' growing need for autonomy; the larger, more anonymous student body; and denial of responsibility. According to Hertzog and Morgan (1998) high school teachers are quick to blame middle schools for promoting poorly prepared students, even though

the middle school teachers had similar problems including indifference, lack of study skills, and lack of parent concern or involvement.

The term mismatch is used by some researchers to describe the inability of schools to match the needs of students and families. Specifically when meeting the needs of minorities and their families, many high schools have been found to be lacking in interactions with parents. However, the differences in interactions between minority and nonminority students vary according to each school (Akos & Galassi, 2004a). Teachers must reach out to minority parents to encourage involvement. Stone (2003) found that higher school achievement was related to higher teacher outreach, and in his study teachers in a school with a predominately Latino student body reported lower levels of outreach than in less diverse schools. This is in direct opposition to the actual needs of students. Research by Akos and Galassi (2004a) has found that Latino families and those with limited English proficiency rely on school teachers and counselors for guidance during the transition to high school. Students entitled to special education also need greater support during the transition. Watson (2004) reported that good transitions can ensure that an IEP meeting does not turn into giving advice about class scheduling and then stopping the support there.

Teachers play a significant role in student success, beyond just meeting curricular requirements. Their expectations are strongly linked to a student's perception of high school and to his or her academic self-concept and values, and are viewed by students as strong predictors of their future college plans (Murdock et al., 2000). Lower-performing students need help addressing weaknesses without being labeled; consequently teachers

need to realize the important function they serve in supporting a struggling student (Mac Iver & Epstein, 1991; Newman et al., 2000). Students' perceptions of their teachers' level of support are related to their academic outcomes. When students perceived their teachers as fair while still having high expectations, they were more academically engaged, evidencing the relationship between teacher interaction and motivation/adaptation (Barber & Olsen, 2004; Murdock et al., 2000). Given the teachers' influence beyond the report cards and high-stakes testing results, it is vital that communication take place between home and school. Transition interventions, for this reason, need to be directed at both teachers and parents at the high school level (Stone, 2003).

Race and Ethnicity

Although there is a paucity of research addressing the specific effects of transition on minority students, there is research on the issue of African American and disadvantaged urban youths' high school completion. From these studies, one can gather general information about the issues of race, ethnicity, and transitioning to ninth grade. Topics of concern for minority students can be examined within the same categories as those of the general ninth grade population: environment, student characteristics, socio-economic status, family support/involvement, peer pressure, and teacher/school support.

Lohman, Newman, Myers, and Smith (2000, p. 2) found that, "Low-income minority youth are vulnerable to declines in academic motivation and performance during the transition to ninth grade, which may not be regained in the subsequent years of high school." Further, the new, larger, physical environment increases anonymity for all students. High school class organization separates middle school students from their

racially congruent peer group and adds to the difficulty in adjustment. Decreases in congruence have been found to negatively impact self-esteem (French et al., 2000). Researchers Haycock and Huang (2001, p. 17) asserted that smaller school environments are particularly advantageous for poor and minority students, "with school size offsetting other disadvantages common to high poverty, high minority schools."

In general, a student's individual characteristics are critical to his or her ability to navigate a smooth transition. Studies found this to be true for African American students as well. French et al. (2000) found that for ethnic minorities the transition to high school may heighten awareness of their minority status and cause them to question their role and identity. According to Newman et al.'s (2000) study, minority students adopt the norms of the majority culture while at school, and dedicated African American students devise strategies to deal with negative peer pressure, often becoming a raceless persona. In one study (Honora, 2003), African American males developed a defense mechanism in response to what they perceived as teachers focusing more on their behaviors than on academics. Honora (p.74) posited that their perceptions of disapproval allow them to, "disengage their self-appraisal from their academic performance and attach self-worth to domains in which they feel more competent (e.g., sports)..." Disengaging from academic performance leads to lower grades, lower self-esteem, and course failure, and leaves more students behind.

To explain why African American students' self-esteem was not related to academic demands, Steele (as cited in French et al., 2000) offered disidentification theory: "As these students experience a lack of academic success year after year and also

observe their Black peers experiencing the same thing, they protect their mental health by not attaching their self-worth to their school achievement" (French et al. p.). Although the majority of minority research is focused on African Americans, Akos and Galassi (2004a) found that Latinos have significant transition difficulty and Reyes et al. (2000) asserted that many minority youth are more sensitive than white students to transition changes.

The socio-economic status of students and their families has previously been addressed in this paper as having an impact on transition. According to Newman et al. (2000), community traits impact families; and minority students in under-resourced communities are more apt to suffer from conduct problems, loss of control, and poor school attendance than minority students with adequate resources. Possible issues of overcrowding and poverty result in a less personalized education as teachers and budgets are stretched thinly. Murdock et al. (2000) found that many low-income and minority students were skeptical that education can lead to a better future. Other studies (e.g. Akos & Galassi, 2004a; Baker & Stevenson, 1986; and Reyes et al., 2000) have found that minority youth are more sensitive to transition and that schools' transition programs need to be tailored to the needs of specific groups.

As with the general population, minority students benefit from parent involvement. Latino parents decrease their involvement at school once their children enter high school (Akos & Galassi, 2004a). Given that many minorities have significant transition difficulty, teachers and counselors may have to encourage participation from hesitant minority parents (Reyes et al., 2000; Stone, 2003).

Newman et al. (2000) studied the relationship between minority student success and parent involvement. They found that successful African American students come from homes with a parent (or parents) who sets clear limits, encourages academic activities, and carefully monitors other activities. The most successful African American students in Newman et al.'s study were those whose parents showed faith in the students' abilities and communicated with school, family, and the community about educational preparation. Interestingly, the same study found that while a mother's support is linked to success, family structure itself was not found to be predictive for African American student's high school success.

Peer pressure is an issue with racial minority students as well as the general student population. Particular to the concerns of minority students is the struggle to preserve the link with friends while avoiding activities that could compromise their academic success (Newman et al., 2000). African American students coming from overpopulated urban schools may have difficulty finding peers who encourage the pursuit of academics. However, athletic success has been correlated with African American males' popularity (Newman et al.).

Minority students' needs for school and teacher support are no different from the needs of the general population. Many high school teachers view parents of minority students as unconcerned or uninvolved (Stone, 2003), but Stone's study found that high school teachers were unwilling to increase their contacts with parents of average or struggling students. Lower performing students require supportive teachers to find success, and a study by Davis and Jordan found that teacher commitment is linked to

African American success rates (Davis & Jordan as cited in Newman et al., 2000). Akos and Galassi (2004a) recommend offering special programming for Latino students and their families. Regardless of students' personal factors, schools can make a difference. Jordan (2001) explained the impact that a school can make despite personal factors:

> ...while family background characteristics, such as gender, race-ethnicity, and SES play an important role in the educational success or failure of high school students, students' early experiences and behaviors at the outset of high school (ninth grade), and institutional support can make a significant difference. (p. 1)

Gender

As is the case with transition research specifically addressing race, there is little transition research specifically addressing gender issues. Still, differences between genders have been found to be an issue. Asplaugh (1999) found that males have a higher dropout rate than females. Isakson and Jarvis' (1999) studies revealed that females tend to struggle more with social issues during the transition while males struggle more with academics. This concurs with Akos and Galassi's (2004a) writings that peer upheaval and psychological adjustment experienced by middle school females may present themselves later in their feeling less connected after the transition to high school, while males make the social adjustment to high school more easily. Some studies find females to have a greater drop in achievement than males because males feel more connected (Akos & Galassi, 2004a; Watson, 2004).

A few studies exist that address homework completion and at-risk students by gender differences. Topics covered in these studies are relevant to successful transitions yet contradict what little transition research there is. A study by Xu (2006) found that females more frequently reported working to manage their workspace, budget their time,

and monitor their emotions than males did. This suggests that females may have more success in navigating the academics and organization involved with transitioning to a new school despite struggling on a social level. Additionally, in her study on gender and high school completion, Honora (2003, p. 14) found, "Lower achieving girls viewed school as simply another societal standard enforced on youth." What mattered to lower achieving females was "getting it over with." Lower achieving males, on the other hand, were found to consider school attendance as a positive social outlet. While the males seem to attend for social purposes, the females may commit to work completion simply to be done with the course.

Although males seem to feel more socially connected in high school, they need support and supervision when it comes to work completion (Akos & Galassi, 2004a; Xu, 2006). Reinforcing the need for support, Huurre et al.'s (2006) research found that regardless of achievement level, students' relationships with teachers predicted the number of years of high school completed among males. In fact, Fletcher et al. (1995) found research that supports any adult involvement. They reported that having larger numbers of non-related adults within social networks is associated with better school performance and attendance and more positive social behavior among adolescent males. Given the knowledge that both male and female students require adult involvement for high school success, parents, teachers and adult friends need to be particularly vigilant about being active in their students' educations.

Reviews of Present Transition Programs

A great number of programs exist that address high school reform, however there

are very few empirically supported programs developed specifically for transition to high school. This neglect of transition-specific programming is perplexing because of the overwhelming factors presented above and in articles about school reform that stress the significance of success in ninth grade on high school completion. Three transition programs presently underway are discussed below. These programs were selected for review because they were some of the very few programs specifically addressing ninth grade transition that have been empirically studied. The author chose the programs based on the program developers' assertions that they were stand-alone programs, able to be implemented independently of at-risk or other prevention programs. These programs were also the only ones that provided specific implementation guidelines and detailed strategies.

Each program is described below, and empirical work evaluating the success of each program will be reviewed. Finally, each program will be evaluated based on the four essential components identified by the literature review: (a) physical environment, (b) positive relationship with school adult, (c) parent involvement and communication, and (d) student connectedness.

Freshman Seminar/Talent Development High School

The Talent Development High School (TDHS) model for school reform is a high school reform program that added a more specific transition program to its original format. TDHS is a project of the Center for Social Organization of Schools (CSOS) which is an educational research and development center at Johns Hopkins University (CSOS, 2007). In 1995 the first TDHS was established in Baltimore, MD. Although

features of the program included a separate wing, administrator, entry, and computer lab for the ninth grade known as "The Ninth Grade Success Academy" (McPartland, Legters, Jordan, & McDill, 1996), program collaborators found that too many students were lacking the knowledge of social and academic skills necessary for moving through the high school curriculum (CSOS). According to the director and implementation manager of the Freshman Seminar program, Howard Gradet, of Johns Hopkins University (personal communication, June 7, 2006), beginning in the fall of 1999, the Freshman Seminar (FS) program was added to TDHS curriculum to expose ninth grade students to the social and academic skills required for high school success. Freshman Seminar is a semester-long course best suited to the first semester of ninth grade. Skills learned in the course include: study skills, time management, note-taking and social skills. Cooperative learning and team building are the emphasis in FS where, "Each unit is comprised of a complete series of, 80- to 90-minute lesson plans" (CSOS, 2005, p. 1). Freshman Seminar lessons include "real school" assignments where, for example, "...students can learn test-preparation skills while preparing for specific tests in other classes" (CSOS, p.4). Other teachers in turn reinforce the importance of FS by requiring students to use FS skills in their classes.

While there are no standardized tests to determine success rates of skills taught in FS, data from surveys has been procured from Howard Gradet, (personal communication, June 7, 2006). Survey data show that18 months after completing the FS course, students continued to use the skills learned. Note taking, use of graphic organizers and social skills were used the most often. Further data reinforced the reciprocal effect of working with

FS teachers, as teachers found that students were more likely to use FS skills when they are reminded. Given that academic self-efficacy plays a strong role in transition (Reyes et al, 2000; Silverthorn et al., 2005), learning strategies presented in FS should promote student confidence and engagement.

To a limited extent, the FS program addresses all four of the essential components to transition success for all incoming ninth grade students. The environmental component is best addressed of the four. Separate entries, hallways and stairways provide a smaller, more comfortable atmosphere with only 150-180 students. School staff, (teachers and custodians alike), are assigned exclusively to an Academy and know each student by name. The team effort is designed to provide an opportunity for students to connect with involved, interested adults within the school setting. Teacher team members are responsible for contacting home to help connect the two entities, and attendance policy has the teachers contact the student first. This promotes a feeling of support for attendance and belonging instead of an atmosphere punishment and threatening. The parent involvement component is the one most lacking in the FS sections of TDHS. While the strengths of the FS program deal with student belonging, learning and success, there is no strong parent component to the program. Given that parent involvement is essential to student success, program administrators would do well to include more opportunities that encourage direct parent involvement. A great advantage of this program is that it is for all incoming ninth grade students.

School Transitional Environmental Program

The School Transitional Environmental Program (STEP) is a primary prevention

program, "...designed to facilitate the adaptation of students making normative transitions" (Felner & Adan, 1998, p.113). The program is intended for larger middle or high schools with several feeder schools where an unprepared student may fail anonymously. Targeted participants in the STEP program are incoming ninth grade students whose risk factors are related to probable academic or coping difficulties, such as those with low SES, low family support, or undeveloped coping skills. There are two primary components of STEP: reorganizing the social system by changing the environment and assigning students to a homeroom where the teacher's role is different from the norm.

A simple reorganization of the environment can provide a more stable peer support system. Placing the STEP participants in the same self-contained general classes and area within the school building for the four core subject areas and homeroom limits other influences and the intimidation that comes about in larger environments (Blueprints, 1999; Felner & Adan, 1998).

The homeroom teachers in STEP serve a different role than those in general education. Prior to the school year, homeroom teachers receive social-emotional counseling skills training that can enhance general school counseling. Students participate in homeroom counseling sessions approximately once a month. Homeroom teachers also are responsible for helping students choose classes and calling students' homes when their students are absent.

One empirical study was conducted on STEP. The program was implemented at a large urban high school primarily serving minority students and students with low SES

backgrounds. Sixty-five incoming ninth grade students were selected to participate in the study. Selections were based on low SES and minority background. Fifty-nine of the STEP participants completed the full-year program and assessment measures and were compared to 113 peers who completed the assessment as a matched control sample. Within the STEP setting students were scheduled by ability groupings, having most of their classes with the same peers, but all classes were made up of people from their STEP unit (Felner & Adan, 1998). Program findings are explained based on an overall comparison of the STEP participants' and control group's outcome (academic performance, absenteeism and self concept scores) and process (emotional and behavioral dysfunction and difficulties) measures. In all three outcome measures the STEP group avoided the pitfalls of the control group whose results were not atypical of previous years in the same school setting. Felner and Adan's study of the trial found the following:

> Overall, compared to control students, STEP students perceived the school environment as more stable, understandable, well-organized, involving, and supportive. They also saw teachers and other school personnel as providing higher levels of support, especially by the end of the school year. By contrast, control group students evidenced significantly greater declines in their evaluation of the school environment and their feelings about school and school personnel across the year than did STEP students. (p. 117).

According to a follow-up study using school records, conducted after the expected year of graduation, Felner and Adan determined that students from STEP and the control group were well matched on relevant demographic and pre-transition measures. Their follow-up study found that approximately the same number of students in each group moved or transferred. Dropout rates for the participants in STEP were 21% compared to 43% for the control group. Unlike STEP participants, some of the control group students

actually were placed in alternative programs so their dropout numbers potentially could have been even higher. The trial students' absenteeism and grades were also reviewed and compared in the follow-up study. According to school records during the first two years of high school STEP students had fewer absences and significantly higher grades than did the control students. By the end of the second year, only 4% of STEP students dropped out, while approximately 19% of the control group had dropped out. Felner and Adan attributed the difference to the effectiveness of the program to keep, "...high-risk students above their threshold of vulnerability and in preventing the development of more serious problems" (p. 117). During the final two grades the groups' absences and grades were more similar – a likely outcome of the struggling control students' dropping out.

Success of STEP emphasizes that supporting transition to the ninth grade produces desirable long-term results while being a fairly inexpensive, unobtrusive program. The cost for modifying the school environment and training participating faculty is considerably less than the toll that high school drop-outs have upon society. These findings concur with Watson (2004) who urges that transition intervention is cost effective. Added benefits of STEP are that it works well within an already established curriculum and other interventions such as suicide and drug use detection/interventions. Possibly most beneficial of all is the fact that teachers in the pilot study, "felt better about the school environment and their involvements in it" (Felner & Adan, 1998, p. 9). Teacher satisfaction will help insure program continuity as well as a desirable classroom environment for struggling students.

Of the four essential transition components, (physical environment, positive

relationship with school adult, parent involvement and communication, and student connectedness), the STEP program's best strength is connecting the student with an interested adult. The homeroom teachers in the STEP program have social-emotional counseling skills training and provide monthly counseling sessions. Beyond emotional support, homeroom teachers help students select classes and also are the contact person for home. STEP participants' environments are familiar as students share the same homerooms and core classes all within close proximity to each other. The smaller environment and connection with the homeroom teacher lead to a feeling of belonging and connectedness. Like the TDHS, components that encourage parent involvement are not formally developed. The missing parent component and the fact that STEP is not for all ninth grade students are the biggest drawbacks to an otherwise well-planned transition program.

Capital High Academy for Ninth Grade Students Exceeding Standards

Capital High Academy for Ninth Grade Students Exceeding Standards (CHANGES) is an even newer intervention program that uses basic strategies similar to the two programs described previously. In response to deplorable ninth grade reading scores, the West Virginia High School's leaders decided to form a small learning community (CHANGES) that included embedded study skills, research-based classroom management, and culturally responsive teaching and practices (Hughes, Copley, & Baker, 2005). The program's overall goal is to accelerate student success in an effort to circumvent the need to remediate (Capital High School, 2005). Specific goals for CHANGES were to increase the pass rate for ninth grade students, increase the number

of previously low-achievers enrolling in honors/AP courses, and increase the number of low-achieving students to select an academic path that leads to a baccalaureate program or above (Hughes et al.; Southern Regional Education Board, 2005).

The first implementation of the program was in the fall of 2004. Prior to the beginning of the school year, 56 incoming ninth grade students were selected for CHANGES based on their eighth grade standardized test scores. According to the school's website, student participants were those possessing high abilities, but whose grades and standardized test scores did not reflect their strengths. Parents of selected students were sent a letter describing the program and requesting permission for participation with the knowledge of their right to remove their student from the program at any time. The control group students were selected based on matching the characteristics (SES, gender, and race) of the CHANGES participants as closely as possible. Teachers involved in the program were selected from those showing a willingness to participate in professional development, a strong desire to work with challenging students, and having knowledge and competency in culturally relevant instructional strategies (Hughes et al., 2005).

Like the two programs described previously, the CHANGES (also referred to as "the Academy") classrooms were all located within the same wing of the school building where the participants' core classes are taught with study skills embedded. The school within a school (SWS) environment was designed to have its own administrator, counselor and schedule (Hughes et al., 2005).

An external evaluator group, Edvantia, studied the effects that participating in the Academy had on student outcomes. Edvantia's specific goals were to document strategies, processes and activities, note differences in instruction between Academy faculty and regular faculty, and finally examine student outcomes to determine whether the Academy had any effect on student skills, attitudes and/or perceptions (Hughes et al., 2005).

Edvantia's observations of CHANGES's first year were used to compare the behaviors of teachers and students to the general education teachers and control group students. Fifteen students made up the control group which was compared to a subgroup of CHANGES students having similar demographic characteristics. Using Edvantia's information, Hughes et al. (2005) reported that compared to control teachers, Academy teachers used significantly more incentives for learning, were nearly significantly higher in their quality of instruction, were more culturally equitable, and provided a more cheerful, inviting, and safe environment. Hughes et al.'s conclusion stated that Academy teachers felt that interacting with students using methods such as questioning and cueing to check for understanding had a positive influence on teaching and learning and was well-received by students. Further, students were reported as being proud and bragging of their accomplishments, which bolstered engagement.

Despite the successes described above, when compared to the control group CHANGES's students still had academic and social difficulties. Edvantia's observations found Academy students to be on-task less often than the control group (77% compared to 87%), which led to loss of learning opportunity. Additionally, Academy teacher logs

frequently reflected issues with discipline and tardiness as well as upsets with changes in scheduling as interfering with academics. Classroom observation data indicated this was not an issue in the control classrooms. In response to these difficulties, Hughes et al. (2005) supplied recommendations for future implementation that addressed the off-task behaviors and discipline issues. At the end of the first year, ninth grade CHANGES' participants were "...remarkably similar to their control group peers in terms of perceptions and attitudes about themselves and their educational experiences."

Although there is room for improvement in each of the three transition programs, CHANGES provided the most opportunity for parent involvement and reported higher student perceptions of belonging. Before the school year started, the program provided transportation to a well-attended family picnic. This was a great opportunity for families to become involved. However, results show that participation from parents faded out once school was in session. Teachers on the CHANGES team assigned Wednesdays as a day to send home letters and phone calls to communicate "good news." Academy staff and teachers planned to further improve communication by providing regular updates on class performance. The essential transition piece, promoting a sense of connectedness, was addressed within the classroom. Results of the Edvantia study found that the faculty created safe, welcoming, and fair learning environments for students, where there were culturally responsive, student-led discussions. As with the previous two programs, the Academy's environment promoted a feeling of belonging by having its own wing and entrance, home rooms and core classes with other CHANGES students, and shared counselor and teachers. These supports set the stage for student connection with an adult.

Like the STEP program, a major drawback to the CHANGES program is that it targeted only certain incoming ninth grade students instead of them all.

The three transition programs discussed here involve several of the components known to be helpful in promoting successful transitions to high school: providing a non-threatening physical environment, positive relationships with a school adult, communication with parents, and student feeling of connectedness.

STEP and CHANGES, which target selected incoming ninth grade students having academic or social risk factors, are more comprehensive. STEP and CHANGES involved altering the environment including the teachers' roles as well as embedded study and social skills training. The stable peer groupings and altered environments helped avoid student anonymity. A great advantage of this was the teacher buy-in and a more positive environment. Of the three programs discussed, FS is the only one which simply adds another class to a pre-existing at-risk program. While the advantages of equipping students with study skills (note-taking, test preparation, mnemonic devices, graphic organizers, conflict resolution, etc.) seems obvious, the particular program has yet to be determined successful empirically. Still, according to CSOS (2005), FS does target all incoming freshmen while providing a smaller environment with positive teacher and staff connections.

While results of all three programs are encouraging so far, further follow-up is needed to determine their long-term benefits. Only CHANGES has specifically discussed planned opportunities for parent involvement, and results of the study by Hughes, Copley, and Baker (2005), study results suggest there is still room for improvement in

this area. Finally, while all three transition programs claim to be efficacious, CHANGES is the only program to be evaluated externally.

Given the various potentials of the three approaches, it is important to gather further evidence regarding one of their fundamental differences: targeting selected students versus primary programs aimed at all incoming ninth grade students. Are measures which treat all students in transition as being at some level "at risk" worthwhile?

Need for More Empirical Research

The purpose of this study is to add empirical research to the presently insufficient research investigating the efficacy of transition programming. Ninth grade outcomes, including attendance and GPA, were examined for a cohort that participated in a transition program with the immediately preceding cohort that did not participate in the special program. Students who participated in the transition program were surveyed to assess attitudes toward high school and satisfaction with the transition program. In addition, three ninth grade students who demonstrated differing degrees of adjustment to high school were interviewed. The following hypotheses will be addressed in this study:

1. The intervention group will have better ninth grade attendance than the comparison group.

2. Attendance will differ depending on gender and SES for intervention and comparison groups.

3. The intervention group will have better ninth grade GPA than the comparison group.

4. GPA will differ depending on gender and SES for intervention and comparison groups.

5. Students who participate in the intervention group will consider the New Student Day helpful.

6. Students who participate in the intervention will have positive attitudes about school; specifically about relationships with school adults, school activities, and homework completion.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The newly implemented transition interventions studied in this research took place at a large high school in the Midwest (enrollment 1,700 students). In response to alarming dropout rates at the district's only high school, a transition committee was formed in an effort to increase student success early-on in incoming students' high school careers. First, to address the need for a non-threatening environment, the school instituted a ninth grade only first day of classes, called "New Student Day." Second, all ninth grade students were assigned to a study skills class. Third, ninth grade class counselors made a concerted effort to follow-up on potential attendance issues early. It was the transition committee's intention to make the building less threatening, make students feel important and teach them skills for high school survival.

New Student Day allowed all incoming ninth grade students to learn their way around the building without also having to worry about navigating around upperclassmen, hazing, and being overwhelmed by the large number of fellow students. The change in school starting dates (one day later than the rest of the school district) for grades 10-12 was explained in a letter included with registration packets that were sent to high school students during the summer. School starting dates were also published in the newspaper. New students in other grades were also allowed to attend, but their attendance was not required.

The school continued their practice of holding "Orientation Night" prior to school starting, so that parents could meet the teachers and help their students find their way

through the new landscape. At orientation families were given maps of the school as well as a reminder that New Student Day was primarily for incoming ninth grade students.

On the district's first day of school, 10^{th} -12^{th} grade students enjoyed one more day of summer vacation while the ninth grade students were expected to make their way to their first day of high school. Student council representatives and teachers manned the hallways and provided information and more building maps as needed. The students followed an early dismissal schedule going from class to class until the end of their scheduled day. The shortened class schedule provided an hour at the end of the day where students could attend an activity fair in the cafeteria to learn about the many groups, activities, clubs, sports, etc. that are offered at the school.

The study skills class, called "Freshman Survey," was a new class developed specifically for ninth grade students transitioning into high school. The class met every other day, opposite gym class for one semester. Its purpose was to provide ninth grade students with skills required for making good academic decisions. Some of the topics covered included social principles, critical thinking skills, respect, leadership, bullying, integrity, and creativity.

In effort to thwart attendance problems before students found themselves unable to recover, ninth grade guidance counselors increased their response to absences. Instead of waiting to sign the quarterly letters that are sent to parents of students having six or more absences, counselors intervened more quickly. With the assistance of the attendance office, counselors tracked patterns and multiple absences and acted upon them by contacting parents and students. They were persistent in their efforts to solve any

academic, personal or social problems that might be contributing to absences. Their intent was to let both the student and the parents know that counselors were available to advocate and support them as needed.

Participants

Participants were 852 students from two consecutive cohorts during their ninth grade years of high school. The students attended an urban high school in the Midwest. There is only one high school in the research project's school district. Statistics from 2006, when the new transition strategies were put into place, revealed that 21% were minority students and 31% were eligible for free/reduced lunch. As part of a strategy to reduce dropout rates and support high school students, the school district developed a transition program for incoming ninth grade students beginning with the 2010 graduating class. Four hundred five students were in the intervention cohort. The class of 2009, the comparison cohort, (N = 475) did not participate in the "New Student" transition activities, so it serves as a comparison group. There were no statistically significant differences between the makeup of the cohorts in ethnicity, SES, or gender (chi square (1) = 3.10, p = .078; chi square (1) = .357, p = .550; and chi square (1) = .008, p = .929, respectively). Eighty-four percent of the 405 intervention cohort students participated in the survey given in January of their ninth grade year.

Three students from the class of 2010 were interviewed. Based on GPA, students participating were from the following categories: an honor student, an average student, and a struggling student. Their identities were coded to protect confidentiality. It was the researcher's intention to interview a non-attending student. However, despite the

non-attending student's great interest in participating, consent could not be obtained from the custodial parent.

Materials

Data were collected during the 2005–2007 school years by means of self-report surveys completed by the students, student interviews, and regularly collected high school data.

Ninth Grade Surveys. Student opinion surveys were developed by the two guidance counselors on the high school transition team and the author, who was also a part of the transition team. Questions were developed based on research citing the importance of addressing student opinions about the new environment, self-efficacy and feelings about school, parent/teacher support, and extra-curricular involvement. Additional items were included to address counselor questions regarding ability to complete homework and participation in an intensive transition program offered to at-risk students. Four questions required the students to respond on a 3-point or 5-point Likert scale, and the remaining six questions were in a yes/no format. The four Likert items rated student attitudes toward high school and New Student Day. One yes/no item asked students whether they liked the ninth grade only day, three items concerned connectedness with the school, and one item asked students to indicate whether they had attended "Camp High School," a previously existing transition program for "at-risk" students. A copy of the survey is included as Appendix A. Only students in the intervention cohort completed the survey.

Interviews. The school psychologist at the high school recruited participants using a script developed by the author. Names of interested students and parent contact information were forwarded to the author. The author was then responsible for all permission and consent forms and interview arrangements. Interview questions were developed based on known factors of a successful transition. Item categories were physical environment, self efficacy/connectedness, positive relationships with one school adult, and parent involvement. Copies of the interview questions, Human Subject Consent Form (IRB approval), student and parent recruiting scripts, and permission form are included as Appendixes B, C, D, E, and F, respectively.

Grades and attendance data. Information for both cohorts was collected from regularly gathered school information. In addition, demographic data including gender, socio-economic status (indicated by free and reduced lunch status), and ethnicity were collected from student records. Grades were reported in terms of total ninth grade GPA on a 4-point scale. Student ID numbers were scrambled to random code numbers where even the author was unable to trace them back to the original student numbers. Grades were collected for both cohorts for the end of the ninth grade year. Attendance information was available for the two cohorts for both the first and second semesters of ninth grade. Information about attendance was reported as the number of periods the student was absent each semester. The high school schedule was based on eight periods per day. Student demographic information, including gender, SES, and ethnicity was also collected. In all cases, confidentiality of information was protected by scrambling student identification numbers and assigning each case a new number.

Procedures

Ninth Grade Survey. Counselors on the transition team distributed the surveys to each language arts class. The surveys were completed in January of the intervention group's ninth grade year. Most students took between 5 and 10 minutes to complete the survey. The author was responsible for tabulating the data.

Personal Interviews. Each interview was arranged between the author and the student's parent. The "honor" student was a male whose parent suggested that an interview in their home would be most convenient. After several unsuccessful attempts at arranging an interview in person with the "average" student, a late evening phone interview was arranged. The "struggling" student was a female who arranged to meet after school for the interview, with parent consent. The two interviews that took place in person lasted approximately 10 minutes each. The phone interview took approximately 15 minutes. A copy of the interview questions is included as Appendix B.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Information from the reviewed program is intended to be added to the existing literature and also evaluate whether or not the implemented changes for incoming ninth grade students were enough effort to make a difference.

Grades and Attendance

Differences between males and females, SES groups, and cohorts in grades and absences were investigated using 2 (gender) x 2 (cohort) x 2 (SES) ANOVAs. Absence distributions were not normal, so all absence analyses were conducted with a log transformation.

Attendance. Attendance data were measured by collecting information on the number of class periods a student was absent. There were eight class periods per day. Mean absences and GPAs for combined groups and cohorts are reported in Table 1.

Table 1
Absences and GPA by Cohorts

Outcome Measure	Total		Cohort				
			Intervention		Comparison		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F
Total absences	116.60	105.98	108.97	104.26	123.91	107.22	7.620 **
Fall absences	57.00	59.59	53.43	53.39	53.45	50.92	0.391
Spring absences	63.17	62.97	55.54	57.40	70.36	67.08	10.526 **
GPA	2.58	1.01	2.61	1.04	2.56	0.98	2.279

*$p < .05$
**$p < .01$

The number of absences reflects the number of class periods a student missed during the full year or each semester separately. The total number of absences ranged from 3 to 829 (less than a half day to 104 days), showing considerable variability, and standard deviations are large. Mean absences were slightly higher across the year for the comparison group than for the intervention group.

Absences and GPA by gender and SES are reported in Table 2. Male and female mean absences across the year were nearly identical. However, mean absences for the lower SES groups were considerably higher than absences for the high SES group. Mean absences for the higher SES group was just over 12 days, compared with 20 days for the lower SES group.

Table 2
Absences and GPA by Gender and SES

	Gender					SES				
Outcome Measure	Males		Females			Low		High		
	M	SD	M	SD	F	M	SD	M	SD	F
Total absences	118.97	111.77	114.29	100.09	0.419	160.20	124.94	97.97	90.69	61.887 **
Fall absences	55.39	54.87	51.52	49.24	1.153	76.21	61.83	43.70	43.93	78.979 **
Spring absences	63.58	66.59	62.77	59.29	0.035	83.99	75.05	54.26	54.74	35.814 **
GPA	2.41	1.03	2.75	0.95	33.813 **	2.05	0.98	2.82	0.92	126.631 **

*$p < .05$
**$p < .01$

Inspection of the data suggested that group differences in attendance might depend on the semester considered. Therefore, absences were examined individually for first and second semesters of ninth grade years using 2 (gender) x 2 (cohort) x 2 (SES) ANOVAs. In the first semester there were no differences between cohorts or genders, but absences were greater for the low SES group than for the high SES group.

When second semester attendance was investigated, the intervention cohort showed significantly fewer absences than did the comparison group. As in the fall, there was a significant difference between SES groups in the spring. Again, the lower SES group had more absences than the higher SES group. Additionally, although there was no main effect of gender, it did interact with SES, $F(1,750) = 6.833$, $p = .009$. Males with lower SES had significantly more absences than males with higher SES. Females showed a much smaller difference between SES groups in attendance.

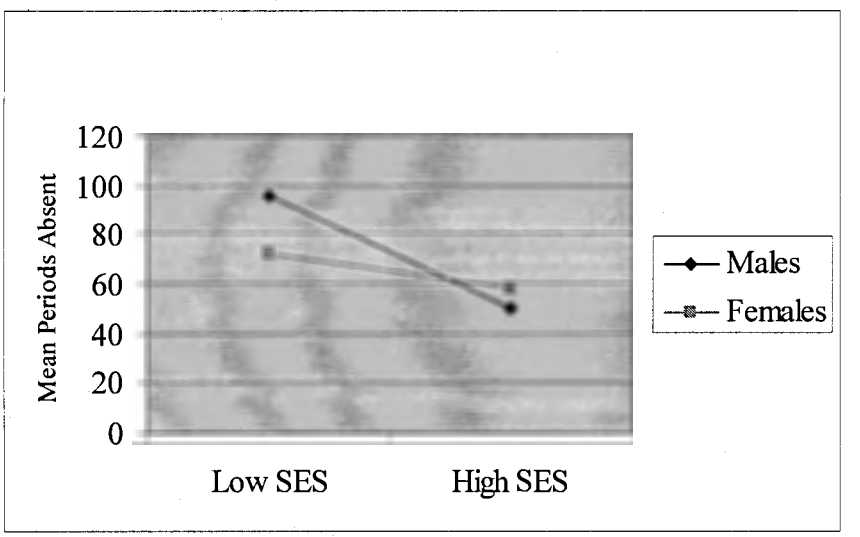

Figure 1. Gender x SES Interaction for Spring Absences

Grades. Comparisons of ninth grade GPA found no differences between cohorts. However, there was a significant difference between genders. Females' GPAs were significantly higher than males' GPAs.

Analysis of GPA differences between SES groups also found a significant difference. The group with lower SES had lower GPAs than did the higher SES group. There was also an interaction between gender and SES $F(1,839) = 4.67, p = .031$. Lower SES males had significantly lower GPAs than females with lower SES, but the gender difference in GPAs among higher SES students was minimal.

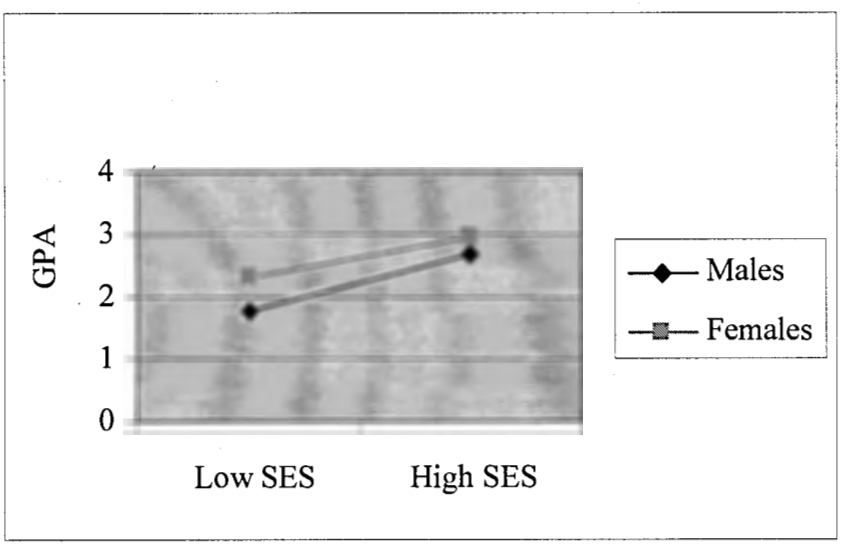

Figure 2. Gender x SES Interaction for GPA

Ninth Grade Transition Survey

A total of 342 students from the intervention group completed the ten-question transition survey which addressed student opinions about high school and about New Student Day.

The survey consisted of 10 items, three rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale, one on a 3-point Likert-type scale, and six items that required a yes/no response. Each of the first four items was analyzed using one-way ANOVAs to investigate any differences in ratings between males and females. Table 3 contains item means and standard deviations for the total group and for males and females separately.

Overall, students rated their opinions of high school in the "Neutral" to "Like it" range. Although both genders generally agreed on how they felt about high school with ratings in the neutral to somewhat positive ranges, results indicate that males gave higher ratings than females on the extent to which they found high school to be better than middle school.

Table 3
Answers to Survey Questions about High School and New Student Day

			Gender				
	Total		Male		Female		
Item	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F(1,312)
Overall, how do you like high school?	3.59	0.97	3.51	1.04	3.67	0.89	2.310
Overall, how does it compare with how you liked middle school?	3.75	1.01	3.88	0.94	3.64	1.06	4.252 *
Before school started, how worried were you about the first week of school?	2.23	0.74	2.43	0.67	2.06	0.76	20.176 **
What was your reaction when you found out that the first day was for ninth graders only?	3.43	1.03	3.19	1.02	3.64	0.99	16.085 **

Note: Item 3 was rated on a 3-point scale (1 = most negative, 3 = most positive). The remaining items were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = most negative, 5 = most positive.)
*$p < .05$
**$p < .01$

Ratings indicated that males were less concerned about the first week of school than were the females, although most mean ratings were in the "worried" to "not worried" ranges. This is consistent with finding that males were less pleased about New Student Day than were the females. Mean responses overall for males and females were in the "didn't matter" to "happy" range.

Six survey items required a yes/no response with "yes" always indicating a positive response. Data were analyzed using chi-square analyses to investigate differences between males and females. Percentages of positive responses for the total group, as well as percentages for males and females separately are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Percentage of Students Responding "Yes" on Survey about High School

		Gender		
Item	Total	Male	Female	Chi Square
Was it helpful to have only 9th graders at school on day 1?	84%	79%	89%	6.495 *
Have you gone to an MHS event outside of school hours?	89%	88%	90%	0.292
Overall, are you able to get your homework completed on time?	79%	75%	83%	2.870
Overall, are your teachers helpful?	84%	82%	86%	1.105
Overall, are other high school staff	83%	82%	84%	0.192
Did you participate in Camp High School?	7%	5%	8%	1.132

*$p < .05$
**$p < .01$

Differences between males and females in the percentage responding positively were found for one item. Somewhat more males than expected did not find the ninth grade only day helpful, and fewer females than expected found it helpful

Four survey items addressed connectedness (participation in school activities and relationships with the adult staff) at the high school. Overall, students responded affirmatively that teachers and other high school staff were helpful and that they were able to complete homework in a timely manner. Very few students said they participated in Camp High School, the pre-existing program for selected at-risk students.

Personal Interviews

Three student interviews were conducted individually. Interview data were not analyzed with specific qualitative methods because of the brevity of the interviews and the relatively structured format. The following is a narrative report from each interview.

Honor student. The interview of the honor student took place at the student's home. When questioned about navigating the new environment and finding his classes, he reported that during the "first couple of days it started out kind of rough," but after he figured out how the building flowed it was easy. He admitted that during his ninth grade year he was tardy to class 10-15 times because of the congestion in the hallways, but he had only been late once during his sophomore year because he knew the best paths. He had never felt that his safety was threatened.

When asked to name the best thing about high school, the honor student quickly responded "Sports!" He explained that sports gave him something to do each day, that it was fun to win, and he enjoyed hanging out with the teams. Lunchtime was another time

when the honor student connected with friends. He said that the cafeteria was "hectic and noisy," but he always sat with the same people and had more than enough time to buy and eat his food.

When asked about how he felt about the teachers he replied that he was "99% happy" with the teachers, but there were some that "aren't the greatest." He answered that there were helpful staff people at the school and that the FFA teacher in particular was extremely helpful, "even if you have problems in life." The honor student estimated that 80%-90% of the staff at his school seemed to get along well with students.

Parents are an important part of his education. He shared that they have never missed a sporting event, but they rarely came to school during school hours. The honor student reported that he normally was able to complete his homework at school even without having a study hall. When asked, he replied that his parents would "be glad to answer" questions if he needed help, but he has not needed any.

Average student. After several unsuccessful attempts to coordinate the student's schedule in person, the interview of the average student took place over the phone. The average student, a male, identified Open House Night with his parents as being particularly helpful in learning how to navigate the high school environment. Open House Night was also part of transition in previous years. Interestingly, he responded that it gave "us" an opportunity to learn where the classes were before the first day, indicating parent involvement. He said the "freshman only" day was also helpful, but after he got used to the school he was able to make a pattern to get from class to class. Since then he has no problems and has never been frightened for his safety.

When asked to name the best thing about high school, the average student stated, "the friends that you make." He also liked the teachers and the extra-curricular activities that he has been involved in. Responding to a question regarding participation in school events outside the school day, he listed participation in football, baseball, wrestling, and student council. He said he liked the sports activities best because of the team atmosphere. He reported that lunchtime was too busy to have time to visit with friends. There were so many students in the cafeteria during his lunch time that he found himself picking food from the shortest line just so he had time to eat.

"I like my teachers at the high school," answered the average student, when asked how he felt. "There really hasn't been a teacher so far that I really didn't like." Despite his declaration of approval, he estimated that only 60% of the staff gets along well with students. When pressed for more information, the student divulged that he had never needed any help within the school setting, but there seemed to be "someone available" if a student needed assistance.

Although the average student's parents did not go to the school as often as they did when he was in middle school, they did continue to stay involved. He explained that his parents attended most of his extra curricular activities. Further, they stayed in touch with teachers by weekly e-mailed progress reports. The average student described his parents as being very involved. Each night they reviewed the amount of homework he had and helped him to budget his time to get it done.

Struggling student. The only female interviewee, the struggling student, chose to meet after school at her aunt's house. She described learning how to get to her classes in

the high school environment as "nerve-wracking," although she was pleased to say she never was late. She went on to explain that once she attended high school for a while, "It's pretty easy. You know where everything is." Like the other interview participants, the struggling student said that she had never felt frightened for her safety while at school. However, unlike her male counterparts, she reported seeing fights in the cafeteria.

When asked to name the best thing about high school she chuckled and said it was the "social aspect. Meeting people, seeing friends every day… (High school) gives more time for friends." She clarified that she chuckled because she admits that part of her trouble with grades was that classes at high school really were not her primary focus. She did participate in swimming and golf, but identified swimming as her favorite because there are more friends involved. The struggling student described lunchtime as "kind of hectic." She explained that lines were long and students had to hurry or they would not have enough time to eat. She wondered if there was a way they could organize lunch so students could have enough time to get through lines and visit while eating.

The struggling student's opinion of teachers was more critical than those of the honor and average student. "Most teachers are pretty good at getting you to do what you're supposed to, but lots are too harsh." When asked to clarify she went on, "they say stuff they don't need to say. I realize that they're trying to get you ready for college, but they go too far." The struggling student answered positively that there are some staff that are willing to help. She responded that she had gone in for extra help with assignments. Unlike the other two respondents, the struggling student rated the staff more negatively

when estimating that only about half of the staff seemed to get along well with students. "Some seem like they don't want to be there," she said.

When discussing parent involvement at school, the struggling student did not give the impression that she found it to be a positive factor in her education. She explained that her parents came to her extra-curricular activities and that her mother was even more involved at the high school level than in the middle school. Instead of indicating her parents' presence as supportive, the struggling student's descriptions suggested a feeling of intrusion. When elaborating, the student explained that her mom was a member of the "booster club" and knew a lot more about "stuff" than other moms. The same negative sentiment followed in the discussion of homework. "I'm bad about homework. They try to encourage me, and made sure I was scheduled for a study hall." She reported that she spent about 15 minutes per week on homework, and usually just tried to get it done at the last minute before class started. Then she admitted that her effort is reflected in her grades.

Non-attending student. When the author attempted by phone to contact the custodial parent of the non-attending student, the student answered that the parent was unavailable. The non-attending student was eager to participate and suggested that I mail the consents and he would be certain to get them returned. After diligent efforts and multiple attempted contacts by mail and phone, the parent was unresponsive. The student contacted the investigator by phone, anxious to participate in the interview and explain that he "didn't want to be a non-attender," but without parent permission, the author was unable to conduct the interview.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the intervention was to ease the transition process to ninth grade to promote academic and social success. As predicted, the intervention group had fewer ninth grade absences than the comparison group. However, the difference was not consistent across semesters. There was no difference between cohorts in fall semester, but there was an average difference of 15 class periods in the spring. The students in the comparison group missed an average of almost 2.5 days more days of ninth grade than the intervention group did. There was a large range in the number of absences of students from both the intervention and comparison groups. Mean absence differences were noteworthy, but the individual differences within each group were also important to examine. Good attendance, fostered by strong transition supports may have indicated better social and academic adjustment. Even though the lack of a control group prevents the conclusion that the intervention caused the difference in absences, the specific attention given to thwarting attendance issues early in the intervention group's ninth grade year may have been beneficial. The result was supported by the fact that there were no major spring events for the comparison cohort that would explain a sharp increase in absences. It was the school's intention to make the environment inviting and safe, so that students would choose to be there over staying home.

Grade point averages were used to assess the ninth grade academic outcomes for intervention and comparison groups. Student grades typically decline between eighth and ninth grades (Akos and Galassi, 2004b). Specific activities in the transition intervention,

including study skills training and activities, were aimed at promoting student competence in the setting targeted academic achievement. It was hypothesized that the intervention group would have higher GPAs than the comparison group. This hypothesis was not supported. Prevention of decline in student success as measured by GPA is important, because we know from research that early academic successes and failures set the stage for future performance (Huurre et al. 2006; Komulainen, 2006; Weiss, 1999). Students frequently show decreases in GPA and the pattern continues for the remainder of the school year (Barone et al., 1991; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Reyes et al, 2000). The lack of cohort differences in GPAs in this study is difficult to interpret because the researcher was unable to obtain comparison eighth grade GPAs for either group.

Although the lack of control groups does not allow for conclusive evidence, some observations can be made. According to the survey and interviews the New Student Day was considered to be a successful way of addressing the issues of environment. Students reported a general satisfaction with school staff. Interviewees differed on the merit of the staff relationships and parent involvement, yet the three agreed it was available.

Gender did play a role in role in GPA where females had higher grade points than males. However, total attendance was similar between the two groups. SES played the biggest role in academic success; with lower SES students having lower GPAs and attendance. Males with low SES achieved more than three-fourths of a letter grade lower, than males with higher SES.

Despite its limitations, the present study has served to identify a significant area of need for student support: lower SES males. Revisions and additions must be made at the intervention high school to make sure that these students can find academic success.

One hypothesis of the study was that in response to the intervention, student attendance would differ based on cohort group, gender and SES. Across the year SES appeared to have a major impact on attendance. Based on transition literature, the author predicted students with lower SES to have lower grades and attendance. Still, the differences of eight days per year difference was surprising. The participating high school must focus on developing services that provide support both at the outset and throughout the students' high school careers. As asserted by Carnoy (2005), low high school completion rates, especially for low SES students, are a major risk for American high schools. Given that males have a higher dropout rate than females (Asplaugh, 1999); interventions should be designed to address concerns common to their group. Results from the present study determined that males with low SES are especially vulnerable to poor attendance and grades. Investigations into the roles of gender and SES on attendance could help determine how to improve future interventions to support transitioning students.

An enormous influence on student success is his or her SES. Altogether the students with lower SES missed more than three weeks of instruction in one year's time. This was an average of more than one full week compared to their higher SES peers. Clearly this discrepancy placed lower SES students at a greater disadvantage academically. As one would expect, study results found that lower SES students GPAs

were an average of three-fourths a letter grade beneath their same grade peers. Receiving low scores can reinforce negative feelings about school and lead to even worse performance and attendance. Data revealed that the female students had higher GPAs than their male counterparts. The review of literature suggests that this may have been a result of having more study skills like organizing their workspaces and managing their time while males needed more supervision to ensure work completion (Akos & Galassi, 2004a; Xu, 2006).

When it comes to attendance the role of gender has less of an influence. In the study, females missed only slightly fewer class periods than males did across the year. However, the lack of overall gender differences found for absences is of less importance than the finding that differences in absences for males and females depended on SES status. In the low SES group, females had fewer absences than males, but there was no gender difference for students in the high SES group. A similar pattern was found for GPAs. Although females showed higher GPAs overall, the difference between GPAs for males and females was larger in the low SES group than in the high SES group. Research from Murdock et al. (2000), maintained that there is a tendency for students from low-income families to doubt the value of education. Perhaps this mindset, coupled with poorer attendance, served to exacerbate the males' academic difficulties. Future transition interventions must target more closely the specific needs of persons based on gender and SES differences, especially males from families with lower SES. Such interventions will need to be a personalized effort from involved adults that can show each student how high school performance can affect their particular futures. Developing a specific,

personal plan for each student's success may encourage engagement. Parents must also be included in these discussions so that they can buy in to the value of supporting their child's academic career (Akos & Galassi, 2000; Falbo, Lein, &Amador, 2001; Newman, Myers, Newman, Lohman, & Smith, 2000).

The transition interventions used in this program did not address the achievement gap among and between SES and gender. Previous studies have identified females as having higher academic success than males, based on GPA (Asplaugh, 1999). Therefore, it was no surprise to the researcher that the same held true at the high school that increased its interventions. In general research indicates that male dropout rates are higher than those of females. However, reviewed literature did not address differences in attendance between genders. Findings in the present study, where females had better attendance overall, were not unexpected. Given the fact that males are more likely to drop out, and that academic success is related to school completion, there was reason to expect females to show better ninth grade attendance and achievement outcomes.

The survey and interviews were developed to investigate the intervention students' attitudes about school. Specifically, the researcher and school counselors and administration sought to determine whether students with transition support showed positive attitudes toward school. They wanted to know if students perceived the environment, school activities, their relationships with staff, and their ability to handle the work load as positive. Overall, the students' opinions of New Student Day ranged from neutral to positive. Given the findings of King Rice, (2001) that students were more

concerned about opening their lockers and finding their classes than about academics, New Student Day may have relieved some of the anxiety felt by transition students by allowing ninth graders to manage their first day of classes without also having to worry about upperclassmen crowding the halls and potentially being a threat to them. All three interview participants explained that with time, students learn the pattern to the high school layout. The average student mentioned New Student Day as being a helpful element in learning how to navigate the new environment.

Because the transition to larger physical environments increases anonymity (French et al., 2000), New Student Day was implemented to diminish crowd sizes and feelings of intimidation. A handful of student council upperclassmen as guides in hallways and only ninth grade students attending classes reduced the population in attendance to approximately only one fourth of the student body. The ability to navigate the new environment in a less threatening atmosphere was considered helpful by the majority of the ninth grade students. Therefore, the New Student Day should be considered as a beneficial component of a positive transition experience.

Although student attitudes about relationships with adults, transition, school activities, homework completion and generally liking school also ranged from neutral to positive, it is likely that some groups of students have more positive perceptions than others. For example, in her interview, the struggling student commented that some adults in school add unnecessary pressure by expecting students to be actively preparing for college. This sentiment reflects research by Falbo et al, (2000), Isakson & Jarvis, (1999), and Newman et al., (2000) that upon entering high school students are expected to take

on more responsibility, adding to an already stressful environment. Research has shown that student academic performance is linked to perception of teacher support (Barber, 2004; Murdock et al., 2000).

Survey results show that the majority of respondents have participated in school events beyond school hours. Involvement in school activities leads to a feeling of connectedness. Researchers have found that such connectedness serves as a protective factor and enhances school engagement (Akos & Galassi, 2004a). Participation in school activities was also valued by interviewees. The social aspects of activities were cited by all three as the most positive feature of participation. Previous research had shown that peer relationships may positively affect the ability for students to manage school-related anxiety (Barone et al., 1991).

The majority of students participating in the survey indicated satisfaction with adult/teacher relationships. In his study of high school transitions, Stone (2003) found that higher school achievement was related to higher teacher outreach. Conceivably, active teacher involvement will help maintain and promote good student work habits.

The student interview component of the research was designed to gain more in-depth information than was available in the survey. At first glance, the three interviewees' responses suggested similarly high level self-efficacy and connectedness. Despite their GPA differences, the three interviewees have quite a lot in common. The author posits that the fact that they agreed to participate indicates a common level of school engagement. Also common to these participants were race (Caucasian), higher SES, parent marital and employment status (all married and gainfully employed) and

involved in their students' educations. While the information gathered from the interviews was somewhat helpful, a more diverse set of students would better represent their intervention group.

Still, when responses were investigated more carefully, differences emerged. For instance, the average and honor students considered the first day of school as overwhelming, but manageable. The struggling student described finding her classes as "nerve-wracking," but was never late. Even though the honor student admitted to being late on multiple occasions, his responses indicate that he was unconcerned. Both the honor and average student could think of staff that was helpful, though they had needed little or no help for themselves. The struggling student viewed the staff as intrusive. Additionally, the struggling student viewed her parents' involvement in school activities as also being intrusive, where the more successful students spoke positively about their parents' level of support. Therefore, although the interviewees present themselves as capable students that are satisfied overall with high school, analysis of their responses suggests that there are differences between struggler and those who are doing fine. Designing transition interventions which recognize and address these differences may require both quantitative and more qualitative research methods.

Overall, the research found a change in attendance, but no change in the GPA between the intervention and comparison groups. More significant differences and interactions were found between and among gender and SES groups regarding GPA and attendance. Although the transition intervention studied here had a neutral to positive

reception from targeted students, there is much room form improvement. Better targeting specific desired outcomes for specific groups in need may prove to be more supportive.

Limitations

Results of this study cannot provide conclusive information about the merit of the newly implemented transition interventions. The lack of a control group makes it impossible to rule out the effects of extraneous variables on student academic and attendance outcomes.

In addition, eighth grade student achievement and attendance data were not available for either cohort. There may have been differences in cohorts in eighth grade, making it difficult to draw firm conclusions from any differences in cohorts in ninth grade. Given that one of the major issues of transitioning to high school is a decline in GPA, a longitudinal GPA study of students receiving transition interventions would be beneficial in evaluating change in indicators of success such as GPA and attendance, and determining the long-term value of the new interventions.

Another limitation is that the intervention studied did not formally address parent involvement, one of the variables known to be important to a successful transition. The only added parent contact was a reactive measure when absences were becoming an issue.

Because the school instituted a few new transition strategies at one time, (New Student Day, study skills, and an intensified attendance issue response), it is impossible to know which components contributed to the differences in absences, if any. Perhaps other outcome measures such as pre and post surveys before and after New Student Day

might have been more sensitive to the effects of the intervention. The ability to link student survey responses to actual academic records could also prove to be quite enlightening, but having to identify themselves may inhibit honest responses.

According to literature (Fletcher, Steinberg, and Dornbusch, 1995; French et al., 2000; Newman et al., 2000), the necessary components of successful transition programming are (a) physical environment, (b) positive relationship with school adult, (c) parent involvement and communication, and (d) student connectedness.

The intervention program was developed to promote early academic and social success upon transitioning to high school. It included only three of the four essential components: environment, relationships with adult, and student connectedness. School data, surveys and interview responses were gathered and examined in order to consider the success of a newly implemented transition program.

Suggestions for Future Research

It would be helpful if future research studied transition interventions that are effective for low SES students, especially males. Additionally, a study of an intervention component beginning early in the 8th grade year could be helpful for developing student support prior to ninth grade. Research addressing the influence of adults, (in and out of the school setting), on the success of ninth grade students could point to more specific transition supports. Further, a study that examines causation for drop-outs may provide information leading to a more meaningful level of support that reduces the negative influences. Longitudinal studies would provide important information on achievement and the effect of transition interventions over time.

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APPENDIX A

NINTH GRADE STUDENT SURVEY

Gender: male female 8th grade attended: CMS WMS Other

1 Overall, how do you like high school?

Hate it Don't like it much Neutral Like it Love it

2 Overall, how does it compare with how you liked middle school? High school is _____ than middle school?

Much worse Worse Same Better Much better

3 Before school started, how worried were you about the first week of school?

Very worried Worried Not worried

4 What was your reaction when you found out that the first day was for ninth grade students only?

Angry Not happy Didn't matter Happy Very happy

5 Was it helpful to have only ninth grade students at school on day 1? Yes No

6 Have you gone to an MHS event outside of school hours? (examples: games, concerts, dances, plays, student clubs, etc.) Yes No

7 Overall, are you able to get your homework completed on time? Yes No

8 Overall, are your teachers helpful? Yes No

9 Overall, are other high school staff helpful? Yes No

10 Did you participate in Camp High School? Yes No

Comments:

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Physical Environment

1.) Thinking back to when you were in ninth grade – what was it like learning where your classes were?

2.) What's it like getting from class to class? Are you ever late for class?

3.) Have you ever felt frightened for your safety while at MHS? If so/not – why?

Self-Efficacy/Connectedness

4.) If you had to name the best thing about high school – what would it be? Tell me more…

5.) Do you participate in any extra-curricular activities or attend school events like sports, music, FFA, Magic the Gathering, Spanish club, etc?

If so, what do you enjoy best?

If not, is it because you choose not to, or is there some other reason?

6.) What's lunchtime like?

Positive Relationships with One School Adult

7.) How do you feel about the teachers and staff at MHS? (no names, please)

8.) Is there a staff person that might be willing to help you out – like if your locker was stuck and they were nearby?

What are some examples of times they've helped you or others?

9.) About what percent of the staff at MHS seem like they get along well with students? Tell me more…

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

10.) How often do your parents come to the school building?

How does it compare to middle school?

11.) How about homework?

Are your parents involved with your homework?

If so, how are they involved?

APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Office of Sponsored Programs

University of Northern Iowa

Human Participants Review Committee
UNI Institutional Review Board (IRB)
213 East Bartlett Hall

Debora Porter
105 E. Fulliam Avenue
Muscatine, IA 52761

Re: IRB 07-0223

Dear Ms. Porter:

Your study, **Smoothing the Transition to High School**, has been approved by the UNI IRB effective **5/12/08**, following an Expedited review performed by **IRB co-chair, Susan Etscheidt, Pd.D.** You may begin enrolling participants in your project.

Modifications: If you need to make changes to your study procedures, samples, or sites, you must request approval of the change before continuing with the research. Changes requiring approval are those that may increase the social, emotional, physical, legal, or privacy risks to participants. Your request may be sent by mail or email to the IRB Administrator.

Problems and Adverse Events: If during the study you observe any problems or events pertaining to participation in your study that are *serious* and *unexpected* (e.g., you did not include them in your IRB materials as a potential risk), you must report this to the IRB within 10 days. Examples include unexpected injury or emotional stress, missteps in the consent documentation, or breaches of confidentiality. You may send this information by mail or email to the IRB Administrator.

Expiration Date: Your study **approval will expire on 5/11/09.** Beyond that, you may not recruit participants or collect data without continuing approval. We will email you an Annual Renewal/Update form about 4-6 weeks before your expiration date, or you can download it from our website. You are responsible for seeking continuing approval before your expiration date *whether you receive a reminder or not.* If your approval lapses, you will need to submit a new application for review.

Closure: If you complete your project before the expiration date, or it ends for other reasons, please download and submit the IRB Project Closure form. It is especially important to do this if you are a student and planning to leave campus at the end of the academic year. Advisors are encouraged to monitor that this occurs.

Forms: Information and all IRB forms are available online at www.uni.edu/osp/research/IRBforms.htm.

If you have any questions about Human Participants Review policies or procedures, please contact me at 319.273.6148 or at anita.kleppe@uni.edu. Best wishes for your project success.

Sincerely,

Anita M. Kleppe

Anita M. Kleppe, MSW
IRB Administrator

Cc: Charlotte Haselhuhn, Advisor

cont 5-22-08 -B

APPENDIX D

RECRUITING SCRIPT - STUDENT

Hi, my name is _____, and I am a school psychologist here at the high school. I work for the AEA and a co-worker is doing a research study on transitioning to high school. She's looking for students from the class of 2010 that would be willing to answer opinion questions about how school is going and about "New Muskie" day. There are only eleven questions, and it shouldn't take more than 20 – 30 minutes. To do this we have to have your permission and your parents' permission. There is no payment for participating, and you can change your mind at any time – even during the interview. There will be no consequences as a result of your participation or non-participation because the study is completely confidential. Results will be used in a formal paper that will be shared with the school district and may be published in professional journals. Again, no personal identifiers will be included in the study.

1. Would you be interested in taking part in this study?	☐Yes	Go to 2
	☐No	Go to 3
2. Thanks for you your interest. Here is a consent for you to sign. I also have to have your parent(s) sign a consent. After I get that, you'll be contacted about setting up a short interview. Thanks again!		
3. Thank you for your time.		

APPENDIX E

RECRUITING SCRIPT - PARENT

Hi, my name is _____, and I am a school psychologist at _____ High School. I work for the AEA, and a co-worker is doing a research study on transitioning to high school. I've offered to help her recruit students from the class of 2010 that would be willing to answer opinion questions about how school is going and about "New Muskie" day. There are only eleven questions, and it shouldn't take more than 20 – 30 minutes. There is no payment for participating and you or your student can change your minds about participating at any time. There will be no consequences as a result of participation or non-participation because the study is completely confidential. Results will be used in a formal paper that will be shared with the school district and may be published in professional journals. Again, no personal identifiers will be included in the study. To do this we have to have your permission and your student's permission.

4. Are you willing to allow your student to take part in this study?	☐Yes	Go to 2
	☐No	Go to 3
5. Thanks for you your interest. You'll be receiving a consent form in the mail within the next few days.		
6. Thank you for your time.		

APPENDIX F

PARENTAL PERMISSION

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA
HUMAN PARTICIPANTS REVIEW
PARENTAL PERMISSION

Invitation to Participate: Your child has been invited to participate in a research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to allow your child to participate in this project. The following information is provided to help you made an informed decision whether or not to participate".

Nature and Purpose: The purpose of the research is to learn students' perceptions about high school and how/if the transition to ninth grade played a part in the student's overall level of success.

Explanation of Procedures: Interview participants will be asked a series of open-ended questions about their feelings about high school, homework, school staff, participation in extra-curricular activities and their overall opinion of school. The interview will take no longer than 60 minutes. All responses will be completely confidential. No electronic recording devices will be used, but instead the principal investigator will handwrite student responses. Participants may discontinue their involvement at any time during the interview.

Discomfort and Risks: There are no foreseeable risks to participation. Interviews will take place at the participants' convenience after school or during study halls.

Benefits: No benefits or compensation will be provided as a result of participating in the interview process.

Confidentiality: The summarized findings with no identifying information may be published in an academic journal or presented at a scholarly conference. Pseudonyms will be used in the transcripts of the interviews. Copies of the report (with no identifying information) will also be provided to the high school.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw: Your child's participation is completely voluntary. He or she is free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all.

Questions: Participants: If you have questions about the study you may contact Deb Porter at (563)299-6167 or dporter@aea9.k12.ia.us. You can also contact the office of the Human Participants Coordinator, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-273-6148, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process."

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my child's participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to allow my son/daughter to participate in this project. I have received a copy of this form.

_____ _____

(Signature of parent/legal guardian) **(Date)**

_____

(Printed name of parent/legal guardian)

_____

(Printed name of child participant)

_____ _____

(Signature of investigator) **(Date)**

[NOTE THAT ONE COPY OF THE ENTIRE CONSENT DOCUMENT (NOT JUST THE AGREEMENT STATEMENT) MUST BE RETURNED TO THE PI AND ANOTHER PROVIDED TO THE PARTICIPANT. SIGNED CONSENT FORMS MUST BE MAINTAINED FOR INSPECTION FOR AT LEAST 3 YEARS]